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UNCLAS THE HAGUE 001672

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DUTCH PARLIAMENT SUPPORTS DEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS IN IRAQ

REF: THE HAGUE

1. Summary: On June 25, the Dutch parliament gave the go-ahead for deployment in the Stabilization Force of about 1,100 troops in the Al-Muthanna province in Iraq. The three government parties were supported by the opposition Labor party and by smaller parties on the center-right. Voting against were the opposition Socialist and Green Left parties, as well as four dissidents from the Labor Party and one from D66, a government party. Defense Minister Kamp reassured the Parliament that adequate arrangements had been made for British and/or U.S. military assistance in the event the Dutch troops were to get into trouble. The 650 Dutch marines and 450 support troops are scheduled to arrive in Iraq by mid-July and to be operative in early August after a few weeks of acclimatization. The initial deployment period is for six months. End summary.

2. At a June 25 hearing of the parliamentary foreign affairs and defense committees, Defense Minister Kamp convinced a large majority that adequate arrangements had been made to guarantee the safety of the Dutch troops in Iraq in a possible emergency situation. "If they get into trouble, we can count on the British. If necessary, there will be assistance from the British division within six hours and air support within 15 minutes." Since the Dutch troops will operate under British command, "they feel fully responsible for us." Besides, he said we have it "black on white" that they will come to our assistance. Kamp did not anticipate, however, that it would come to that but he conceded that the mission was not without risks. "This is not a holiday trip to Gran Canaria," he said. Kamp assured the Parliament that the armament of the Dutch troops was sufficiently "robust." Unlike the situation in Srebrenica, he said the troops are not sent off "with their hands tied behind their back." Among the Dutch troops are sharp shooters and they will have heavy machine guns and anti-tank weapons. Kamp also assured the Parliament that the troops had been well prepared for their mission. Various spokesmen expressed concern about the death of six British soldiers earlier in the week. Kamp, however, viewed it as an unfortunate incident and not as an organized campaign against the British.

3. A minority of opponents regarded UNSC resolution 1483 as an insufficient basis for deployment, feared a repetition of the misfortunes of Dutch troops in Srebrenica and objected to what they viewed as the Dutch troops becoming part of the U.S.-UK occupation force. "As long as this is no UN operation, we have no business there," said opposition Labor party deputy floorleader Adri Duivesteijn, one of four dissidents in the 42-member parliamentary group. "What is the legitimacy of this occupation force after a war in which governments were deceived?" he questioned. Minister Kamp sneered at SP spokesman Van Bommel that "parties that oppose peacekeeping no matter what have no right to speak." He pointed out that a clear distinction is being made between countries that supply troops to the Stabilization Force and the U.S. and UK as occupying forces, even though the minister had to admit that this distinction may not be obvious to the average Iraqi. Foreign Minister De Hoop Scheffer assured Parliament that the mission of the Dutch troops was to advance peace and stability in Iraq, but conceded that "serving the peace is more difficult than waging war."

Sobel